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Tuesday, 18 October 1994, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Essy ..... (Côte d'Ivoire)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 95 ***(continued)***

Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

International Conference on Families

The President *(interpretation from French)*: I should like to inform the Assembly that in a letter dated 18 October 1994 the Permanent Representative of Canada, on behalf of the Western European and Other States, has requested that the Assembly hear in plenary meeting a statement by the observer of the Holy See during the International Conference on Families.

Members will recall that, in accordance with established practice of the General Assembly, observer non-Member States may normally make statements only in the Main Committees. However, following consultations and taking into account the importance attached to the issues under discussion, it is proposed that the General Assembly should take a decision to hear the observer of the Holy See in the course of the International Conference on Families. I take it that there is no objection to this proposal.

It was so decided.

The President *(interpretation from French)*: I call first on Mr. Michael Woods, Minister for Social Welfare of Ireland.

Mr. Woods (Ireland): I have the honour to address the General Assembly on behalf of the Government of Ireland.

I would like to congratulate the United Nations on the outstanding success of the International Year of the Family all over the world. The Organization's initiative in devoting these plenary meetings to an International Conference on Families is particularly welcome.

Ireland has always been very committed to the United Nations, of which we have been a member since 1955. Next year marks the fiftieth anniversary of this Organization. Over the years we have made our own contribution, particularly in the area of peace-keeping operations. We have participated in and signed many Conventions, which have helped us to shape our own policies. We have expanded our overseas aid programmes to give greater economic and technical support to developing countries, particularly in Africa.

Yet, for all the progress that has been made world-wide, there is still a great distance to be travelled to a world of justice, equality and respect for the individual. People of all nations still look to the United Nations to help them travel that distance and to meet the challenges that arise on the way.

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I know that all who are present here today will warmly welcome the success to date of the process towards achieving a lasting peace in the whole island of Ireland. The announcements last August and just last week of a cessation of violence present us with a great opportunity to break free from the stagnation and demoralization caused by the prolonged violence over the past 25 years in Northern Ireland.

Like South Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, we are coming to grips with resolving our own apparently insoluble problems. In doing so, we can provide a tremendous boost to our national confidence and to our international standing.

This historic breakthrough is particularly timely in this International Year of the Family. Families have been the victims of the heartbreak of the past 25 years of violence in Northern Ireland. I know that all members share our earnest hope that the suffering endured by them has now finally been brought to an end. Families will be the chief beneficiaries of the peace dividend that flows from this peace process.

This International Year of the Family, now coming to a close, has given us an opportunity to highlight the importance of the family as the natural and basic unit of society. That concept of the family was the clear message that came out of a meeting of Ministers Responsible for Family Affairs in the European Union, which I attended last month in Berlin.

Unemployment is the single greatest challenge facing families today. Across Europe some 20 million people are unemployed. Because of our peripheral and demographic situation, our unemployment problem in Ireland is higher than the European average. Some 18 percent of our work force is out of work.

It is a daunting task for any Government to create the right economic climate for employment, one that will meet not only the needs of those currently unemployed but also the hopes and aspirations of a young, emerging work force. This is the challenge facing my Government.

The challenges to family life and the supports needed are issues that must be urgently considered by a developing Europe. The designation by the United Nations of this year as International Year of the Family provides us with the opportunity to address these issues and chart a course for the next millennium. The policies that lead us into the next century must provide supports and progressive options for parents and children, without distinction. We owe it to our children to do it well.

The tradition of the family has always been one of our strongest national characteristics in Ireland. It is a tradition which has focused on support for parents and their children. It is a tradition endorsed by our own Constitution, which recognizes the family as "the natural primary and fundamental unit group of society."

Yet we have never been exclusive in the way we describe the family. Irish society has always recognized the wide-ranging nature of the family unit. This is nowhere more apparent than in the intergenerational relationships within the family. Generations of Irish children have grown up in extended families, with grandparents and elderly relatives living in a caring environment. While families are smaller today, that caring tradition continues, with families increasingly taking an active part in the development of their communities.

Like other European countries, Ireland's strong family tradition is coming under increasing economic and social pressure as we adjust to a fast-moving, more open and rapidly developing European society. Ireland, with a birth-rate of 14.6 per 1000 population, is still among the highest in Europe and one of the few nations with a small, natural increase in population. Almost 50 per cent of the population in Ireland is under the age of 25. Yet the declining trend in population which has been evident in Europe for some time is also developing in Ireland. Almost one fifth of our population is aged 55 or over.

There is a clear need for a new realistic policy and for strategies to strengthen and support the family. In our view, the family is the bedrock of our society, the place where our children find a stable, secure and supportive environment from which to grow and in turn provide a stable and peaceful society.

But families face other challenges, challenges posed by the changes in society itself. The traditional family of breadwinner, spouse and children, while still the most common, is no longer the only family unit. Families are getting smaller - that is evident to us all. The number of lone-parent families is increasing. But there are other changes taking place which require us to widen our perspective on the nature of families. Ageing populations, and an increasing tendency to care for older people in the community, more particularly in their own

homes, have gained recognition for families composed of pensioner and carer.

These changes require a much more flexible approach in the range of supports provided for families in those circumstances. They must encompass not only income maintenance in the event of critical contingencies, such as illness or unemployment, but also tailor-made assistance to address the situation of the family at a particular time in its life cycle. In Ireland, out of a population of 3.6 million, about 800,000 people and their 700,000 dependents rely on social-welfare payments. Families receive additional payments for children, normally up to 18 years of age. Some 250,000 families benefit in this way.

Child income support is a key feature of the Government's commitment to families, with half a million families benefiting from our scheme of Child Benefit. Child Benefit is a universal payment which goes to almost 1 million children, irrespective of the income of the household. Our objective for the future is to develop Child Benefit as the main element of child income support, especially as it is payable to families regardless of their work status. I have recently announced the setting up of a Special Committee to advise me on the future development of our child income supports in the lead-up to our annual budget next January.

We also have support payments for workers bringing up families on low pay, as well as child-related tax-exemption allowances. Back-to-school allowances cover all children in families dependent on social welfare or at work on low pay. One in three school-going children benefit from these allowances. Older people and retired people with dependents receive additional support by way of free travel, special living-alone allowances and assistance with electricity, heating bills and television licenses.

Beginning later this month, we will have our Survivor's Pension extended to widowers on the same terms and conditions as to widows. In this case, both men and women will benefit in the same way from the Survivor's Pension.

The Irish Government is committed to a broad range of institutional, administrative and legislative reforms over the next few years, aimed at strengthening support for the family and, in particular, for women and children. Immediate initiatives include a major programme of family law reform and a referendum on divorce next year. I must mention here that, apart from the right to remarry, we already have divorce on the statute books in Ireland to all intents and purposes in the form of the Judicial Separation and Family Law Reform Act, 1989.

Civil legal aid and advice provision and the family mediation service are also being strengthened. It is also planned to expand child-care facilities and to provide for adoptive leave for adopting parents. Protection for mothers at work is being strengthened and developed.

Studies in Ireland have shown a strong correlation between long-term unemployment and low educational attainment. The objective of our educational schemes for the unemployed is to provide a second chance for those who, for one reason or another, never completed their formal education. The work we are doing in that area is proving to be particularly successful in helping those people get back into the work force.

The voluntary sector can make an inestimable contribution to the social and economic life of a country. It has a key role in developing the community, in fostering self-help and in empowering people to shape their own futures.

In my own country, we are fortunate to enjoy an active and vibrant voluntary sector. In fact, over half the adults in Ireland are involved with a voluntary organization of one kind or another - that is, one in every two persons is involved in a voluntary organization of one kind or another.

It was for this reason that back in 1990 I initiated the Community Development Programme under the auspices of my Department. Funding is provided on a three-year basis to enable resource centres to get off the ground. Other programmes supporting the voluntary sector include once-off grants for capital projects undertaken by organizations to enhance their capacity and a scheme of grants for locally based women's groups, to be followed this year by a scheme of grants for men's groups. The women were doing most of the work in the community, and I knew that. We had difficulty getting the men involved, but once the women were up and getting these grants, the men very soon came forward and wanted the scheme for themselves. It was the women who really brought them forward in the first instance, but it has certainly revitalized the community involvement in solving problems in their own communities, and particularly the problems of the disadvantaged.

All of these initiatives have been extremely successful in empowering local communities to address the problems they encounter.

Support for the family has been a striking aspect of community development in Ireland. In line with the parameters set by the United Nations in relation to the participation of non-governmental organizations, we have actively supported the development of family resource centres. These centres figure prominently in projects looking for funding, equipment, training in parenting skills and other forms of support. They have developed the confidence of local people. Our experience has been that they can be a catalyst for local development, fo. enterprise and for jobs. I am convinced that this type of community development is the way forward. It can strengthen the family and provide a focal point for its development within society.

In relation to jobs, the local community will identify many opportunities in the "micro" field. We hear about job creation and about small industries, but when one comes down to the reality on the ground for many local communities one is really talking about micro-industries and micro-businesses. It is micro-businesses in particular that will be fostered by people working in their own communities.

For the future, then, we must preserve, promote, support and develop the strong family tradition that is to be found in Ireland. The Irish Government is committed to those ideals. Families must be central to future policy development in the United Nations and in other major world agencies that chart the course of world economic and social progress. The completion of the International Year of the Family is only the start of a process, which should lead to a framework within which families will be cherished, and their central contribution to the well-being of society acknowledged and supported. Secondly, family-centred policies will ensure that the new world prosperity does not pass them by.

In particular, we need new, inclusive arrangements so that families can benefit fully from the world-wide drive for jobs. The United Nations must instil new urgency in the development of family-friendly policies. Those who are concerned with economic and general social development are very deeply involved in these tasks, but we must not allow them to forget that the basic and fundamental unit of our society is the members of the family who will suffer most if we do not provide them with opportunities, involvement and jobs.

The United Nations, its specialized agencies and national Governments must implement measures to promote economic development so as to ensure that families benefit from the new prosperity. We also need proper support for families with disabled members as those members strive to live and work independently in our society.

Family policy is not just about population control, as we have heard from the recent Cairo Conference; it embraces issues relevant to all family types. If we in the United Nations are concerned about people and their needs - and I know that we are - we must take account of the many different kinds of family members, including mothers, whether at home or at work, elderly people, people with disabilities, carers and those in need of full-time care. We must come forward with policies that are truly family-friendly.

I should like to conclude by sharing with the Assembly a quotation that I came across recently, which captures the essence of what we are trying to achieve at international level. I believe very strongly that it is time we took a very determined position internationally in relation to people with disabilities by giving them the full involvement in society that they so richly deserve. We have the technologies and the knowledge. We must also have the will to ensure that these people are included in the front line of policies. The quotation to which I have referred, which I regard as particularly profound, is as follows:

> "If you have come to help me, then you can go back home. But if you see my struggle as part of your own survival, then perhaps we can work together."

Those words were uttered at a conference of people with disabilities. They contain a great lesson for all of us.

The President *(interpretation from French)*: I now call on Mr. Gudmundur Arni Stefánsson, Minister of Social Affairs of Iceland, who will speak on behalf of the Nordic countries.

Mr. Stefánsson (Iceland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the five Nordic countries - Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Iceland - on agenda item 95 relating to the International Conference on Families.

Recognition and acceptance of the variety in family structures in different socio-political and cultural systems

is one of the main goals of the United Nations International Year of the Family. In the Nordic countries, the Year of the Family has inspired considerable debate on the condition of families in modern societies. In those countries the family is perceived as a resource that is important both to individuals and to society. It is the basic unit for social integration and social reproduction. Consequently, much attention has been devoted to assessing the impact of social and economic developments in our societies on family life and on the measures to be taken to prevent the social exclusion of vulnerable families and their individual members.

For several decades our Governments have pursued family welfare policies. These policies, which are well integrated into our general welfare systems, emphasize the protection of children and gender equality.

In times of economic recession it is particularly important, if we are to prevent social exclusion, to pay attention to the vulnerability of children and parents who lack support from local social networks. Society must be able to support families in distress. Tragic instances have demonstrated that an efficiently functioning network of social services is necessary. By such means we have been able to arrange crisis and assistance groups for possible victims and the members of their families.

An important feature of family policy in our countries has been concern about the social conditions of motherhood. Our earliest reforms were to a large extent based on measures intended for mothers - in particular, single mothers.

More recently, changing lifestyles and developments in the labour market have led to a number of reforms. The daily experiences of women and their efforts to reconcile family and work constitute a strong argument for the introduction of special incentives to share parental responsibilities, both in the labour market and in the family.

While paying attention to the relevant experiences of women, we have become increasingly aware of the needs of children. The everyday experiences of children have prompted efforts to enhance measures for preventing their early social exclusion.

Furthermore, focusing on the everyday experience of children has, in turn, led to an increased awareness of the role of the father. Attention is now paid in our countries to the importance of involving fathers in sharing family functions. This will be one of the major contributions of the International Year of the Family in our countries.

The International Year of the Family has provided us with insight into and understanding of the mechanisms in the complex interplay between societal processes and family dynamics. Our most urgent concerns are to take measures to support parents in reconciling work and family life in a fruitful way and to provide supplementary services and networks for social and educational support, both for parents and children, in local settings.

This is not the occasion to go into details about these measures. However I would like to underline some of the basic principles on which they are based. Public concern with family issues is based on the individual rights of all family members, relying mainly on general measures; highly committed to gender equality and the rights of the child; connected to related labour market policies; strongly committed to the pursuit of social integration for all members of society.

A central feature in Nordic societies, reflecting a move towards equal status for women, is the high rate of women in gainful employment. A tight daily schedule is a reality for many families with children. Reconciliation of work and family life is necessary. This benefits the working family members, the employers and the whole family and thus society in general. Making the working hours of parents of small or disabled children shorter and more flexible is one solution promoted by the Nordic countries. However, other alternative work arrangements should be available to parents. Using these alternatives should not lead to exclusion from the labour market. In reconciling family life and work life it is important that society offer support in the form of sufficient day-care services.

Equality between family members and full enjoyment of human rights is a basic principle in the Nordic countries. This applies not least to children. In this connection, I would like to stress the importance of the ratification and implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Although problems that concern children cannot be solved simply through legislation, legislation does provide the basis for improving the status of the child. The participation of children in decisions regarding their daily lives is being developed in our countries. The rights of

the child are not the exclusive domain of the family. A child has independent civil and social rights. The laws in our countries include, among other things, provisions regarding the responsibility of parents in caring for their children. The law also guarantees the physical safety of children. In this way, parental authority is exercised within the confines of the law.

Domestic violence remains widespread. The protection of family members against domestic violence, particularly women and children, must be guaranteed by law. Yet legislation cannot stand on its own. It is therefore necessary to discuss domestic violence openly in order to influence general attitudes.

Far-reaching economic and social change calls for revitalized and innovative family policies. Through international cooperation we can learn from each other and adopt models that are suitable to our respective countries. The United Nations is an invaluable forum for this learning process.

The United Nations also plays a central role in supporting programmes related to families. Particularly in countries which cannot afford a comprehensive social safety-net, the role of the family still remains crucial. These countries must be supported in their efforts to provide for the care of elderly people and dependent family members by means that respect individual rights of freedom and integrity.

The International Year of the Family is part of a global effort to promote social and economic development in the world. The International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo made headway in many sectors critical to the family. The World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing next year will give us an opportunity to address a wide range of issues which are closely related to the well-being of the family.

The President *(interpretation from French)*: I now call on Her Excellency Senator Rosemary Crowley, Minister for Family Services of Australia.

Senator Crowley (Australia): It gives me very great pleasure to speak about Australia's contribution to the International Year of the Family. We applaud the initiative of the United Nations in proclaiming 1994 the International Year of the Family.

Australia has embraced the International Year and seized the opportunity to celebrate, reflect upon and support family life in our country.

The United Nations wanted Governments and non-governmental organizations to recognize that their decisions and actions influence how families grow and how well they function as nurturers and providers.

What the Australian Government aimed for, and what I believe it largely achieved, is a new level of commitment to Government policies and programs which are truly family-friendly.

We have celebrated the Year in cooperation with the various spheres of Government in Australia - national, state and local - and with business and the community.

We have recognized that families are as important today as they have ever been. For the most part, they are thriving and making an enormous contribution to society. We have also recognized that there is not just one model of what a successful family looks like.

Australian families are rich in their diversity. The country was home to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples thousands of years before white settlement. Within the cultures of these peoples, the family, particularly the extended family, plays a significant role.

Today's Australian population of 17,000,000 includes people from over 130 ethnic backgrounds and over 220 nationalities. Nearly a quarter of our population was born overseas or has a parent who was born overseas.

Each new wave of settlers has brought different forms of family life, and these differences are recognized in our policies of multiculturalism and support for the diversity of the family.

Celebration of the family has an important positive dimension. It helps to remind all of us - including Governments, employers, unions, and community organizations - of the central place in our culture of the family and the need to ensure that our policies and practices nurture, develop and protect the family.

But celebration is not enough.

A large part of this year has been spent listening closely to what our community has to say about families - about the challenges they are facing, and the ways Governments can best assist them.

The Government established a National Council for the International Year of the Family and it was asked to consult as widely as possible with Australians and report back to the Government on its findings. The Council produced a document called "The Heart of the Matter", which is a window on Australian families in 1994. It served as the basis for community consultation.

The Australian community has responded enthusiastically. There were 70 days of consultation covering all parts of Australia, from the dusty outback to our urban centres, and the Council received over 500 submissions. The Council's final report will be presented to the Government by the end of this month. The Australian Government's response to that report and to the Year will be the Australian Government Agenda for Families, a coherent and comprehensive statement of policy and programmes for families into the future. It will address all aspects of national Government activity that relate to families and the impact of all Government policies on families. It will be a blueprint for Australian families well beyond 1994.

Over the past decade, the Australian Government has implemented a broad range of policies to benefit Australian families. The Government has recognized that family policies are not just welfare policies. They are not just about helping families at the margin.

A nation's fundamental economic policies and infrastructure also have a crucial impact on the well-being of families. At that broad level, the Australian Government has achieved much in the past decade to provide families with opportunities to participate equally in the life of the country. The Government has recognized the importance of policies that assist women to participate fully in society. We have implemented a number of programmes to assist women and enacted legislation to outlaw discrimination.

The Government recognizes that most women in their adult lives will spend some time at home, particularly when their children are young, and some time in the paid work force. In this International Year of the Family, we have introduced new payments that support the choice of women and their families.

If families are to function they need to be free of the stress of poverty, have adequate living conditions, especially housing, be able to rely on a stable system of laws and legislation that respect family autonomy while protecting vulnerable members; and have access to supportive services to help them handle the challenges of life.

Family income support - especially for those on low incomes who are caring for children - has been a major focus of the Australian Government since it was elected in 1983.

The Government has introduced targeted payments to help those on very low incomes, whether or not they are in the work force, via the Family Allowance Supplement. Payments have also been integrated to make the system simpler. We have attempted to give the support directly to the carer - usually the mother - and to maximize incentives for work force participation. In its last national budget, the Government also moved to introduce a new parenting allowance which recognizes the importance of this role and extends the choices available to families. The Government has also increased the rate of child payments to low-income families by 78 per cent in real terms.

The Government is currently conducting a major review of all family income payments to assess how they might be improved and made more accessible.

Family law governing family formation and dissolution is also being systematically reviewed. The Australian Government is introducing major changes to our family laws this year. The changes will ease the painful process of dissolution of marriage and raise the status of children. Children will no longer be viewed as objects for custody but, rather, as people who deserve responsible parenting. The new focus on parental responsibilities will, we hope, minimize the damaging trauma when a family breaks down.

These steps complement the recent establishment of the Child Support Agency. This has put in place statutory child support arrangements which make it illegal for non-custodial parents to shirk their responsibilities to provide financially for their children. Each month the Child Support Agency passes on income support to 300,000 children.

Regrettably the family is not always a safe and secure haven. The Government has a range of strategies

to respond to family violence. These include: a national system of supported accommodation for women and families; a national clearing-house for research on violence against women and children; a national community domestic violence education programme to stop violence against women; and a national strategy to prevent child abuse and neglect.

The Australian Government also supports a comprehensive range of family and parental counselling programmes. During the International Year of the Family the Government moved to further improve the pre-marriage counselling skills of civil celebrants so that the excellent programmes offered by the churches were matched for those married by civil ceremony.

The Government has an explicit objective of ensuring that every Australian has access to secure, adequate, appropriate and affordable housing. A particular priority has been to support community housing that maximizes tenants' control over their housing. Home ownership is still desired by most Australians, and since 1992-1993 over 210,000 low-income and moderate-income families with children have obtained housing loans through Government schemes.

The Government is also aware of the stress that poor health can put on families and it has put in place a universal health insurance scheme - Medicare - which guarantees access to high-quality health care for the whole population. There are also special health programmes targeted at the special health needs of indigenous Australians.

Australia has not been spared the consequences of the recent world recession. The Government recognizes that sufficient jobs and a stable economy are crucial to family cohesion and well-being. To this end, it has extended significantly its employment and training programmes. There is a particular focus on the long-term unemployed, access for young people and opportunities for women. This supplements the education programme for our children, which has seen the proportion who reach the final year of high school increase from under 40 per cent to more than double what it was over the last decade.

In 1990 Australia ratified International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 156 to strengthen its commitment to bridging the gap between families and work. One of the most significant contributions of the Government to family well-being, and to helping families combine paid work with parenting responsibilities, is the expansion of the child-care programme. Since 1983 the number of child-care places supported by the national Government has increased fivefold. The Government is committed now to meeting all work-related demand for child care by the year 2001. The Government also provides financial assistance with fees to keep child care affordable. And to ensure that parents can be confident in the quality of care their children are receiving we have instituted a national accreditation system.

In the industrial sphere laws are being reviewed to help give further effect to ILO Convention 156. The Government has already legislated for a 12-month entitlement to parental leave to be available to all workers and has also legislated expressly to ensure that discrimination on the grounds of family responsibilities is unlawful.

The Government's response to the needs of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is also central to our efforts to help create a mature, tolerant and fair society. Aboriginal peoples and families have historically been among the least advantaged in our community. That is not a situation which the Australian Government and the vast majority of Australian people wish to see continue. Through legislation and through funded programmes we will continue to help this sector of our community to help themselves, and through legislation and funding we will also assist Aboriginal communities to acquire ownership and control of their traditional land in order to help keep communities and families together.

Australia's initiatives for the International Year of the Family are an important part of the social justice agenda we have pursued for over 10 years now. The Australian Government Agenda for Families will build on these initiatives, extend them and, in particular, place the family at the centre of Government policy.

The evidence from a wide range of United Nations bodies, from the Security Council to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), highlights the challenges confronting the world's families. Australia will use the work of the International Year of the Family to set benchmarks against which it can monitor the improvements for families into the next century. My challenge to the United Nations is that it do the same.

The President (interpretation from French): I call next on Mrs. Eveline Hoenigsperger, Director for Family

Affairs, Federal Ministry of Environment, Youth and Family of Austria.

Mrs. Hoenigsperger (Austria): On behalf of the Federal Ministry of Environment, Youth and Family of Austria, which is responsible for the preparation and implementation of the International Year of the Family at the national level, I have the honour to address the General Assembly and present the results of our efforts on this subject.

Austria was among those States which supported Poland's initiative of launching an International Year of the Family at the forty-fourth session of the General Assembly in 1989. Austria's support for this initiative is based on the fact that my country traditionally regards family policy as a priority matter at both the national and the international level.

By international standards Austria maintains a leading role with regard to family allowances and other supportive measures for the family. As a priority issue of Austria's social policy, family policy has been dealt with in a separate "Ministry of Family Affairs" since 1984.

However, much remains to be done. Our efforts have to be continued, increased and improved. New initiatives have to be launched. Therefore, the United Nations initiative to declare an International Year of the Family in 1994 was wholeheartedly welcomed by the Austrian Federal Government as well as by local governments and family organizations.

The Federal Government of Austria entrusted a national committee with the responsibility of preparing and implementing the Year of the Family. The tasks of the National Committee were to develop and to coordinate the activities of the Federal Government, the nine local governments and family organizations. To achieve maximum public awareness and political impact, the National Committee was given a high status. At the same time, the National Committee was asked to seek the integration and participation of non-governmental organizations and family initiatives at the grass-roots level.

The National Committee therefore comprises several levels: the political level, with representatives of the Federal Government and local governments, the cities and communities; the interest groups of employers and employees; and the operational level, represented by the liaison officers of the non-governmental organizations.

The National Committee installed 15 working groups dealing with 15 priority areas of Austrian family policy. Around 700 experts, scientists, politicians, civil servants, members of family organizations and trade unions devoted their experience, expertise and a lot of time to the working groups. This effort initiated the broadest ever discussion process on family policy in Austria.

Apart from the concrete results of the working groups, which will have a strong impact on family policy in Austria at large, the cooperation of individuals of different political and professional backgrounds and experience created a strong integrative effect.

The debate in the working groups of the National Committee emphasized constructive cooperation and finding solution instead of pursuing political aims. This integrative effect of the machinery for the International Year of the Family can be seen as a great success, as it will have a positive influence on the climate for family policy in Austria in the years ahead.

The 15 working groups, which are the cornerstone of the implementation of the International Year of the Family in Austria, deal with the following facets of the phenomenon that we know as the family: family violence, environment, housing, working life, youth, the elderly, family allowances, disability, different forms of living together, difficult living conditions, family law, health, relationship to society, media and education.

It is already evident at this stage that the working groups were able to reveal "blank spots" in Austria's family policy. New concepts and measures, to be put into practice at the political level, will be presented later this year. The results and recommendations of the working groups will make an important contribution to Austria's family policy in the future.

In addition to the conceptual work, the working groups organized, in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, a series of conferences and workshops on specific topics, the results of which not only enriched the work of the working groups, but also enhanced public awareness.

Furthermore, based on a recommendation by the working groups of the National Committee, the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, together with the Federal Ministry of Science and Research launched a comprehensive family research programme.

In order to involve the local level, the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs initiated a competition for projects and ideas which contribute to higher quality of life of the family or to the improvement of the family's problem-solving capacity.

Family organizations organized major events all over Austria, with more than 50,000 families participating. On the International Day of the Family, on 15 May, some 300 family-related events took place in cities and smaller villages. In order to raise public awareness of these events, the Federal Minister for Family Affairs launched an award for journalists focusing on family issues in their work.

Austrian schools were provided with information on the International Year of the Family. Students aged 14 to 18 received a brochure to motivate them to reflect on their families and their role within the family. This initiative can be regarded as a first step towards a family education at school.

Altogether, more than 600 official events were carried out by members of the National Committee, and there was an uncountable number of private initiatives.

Mr. Pallais (Nicaragua), Vice-President, took the Chair.

A first evaluation of the Year's observance at the national level proves that it was possible to achieve a higher awareness of family issues by the public and to enhance the status of family policy at the governmental level. Therefore, we are now confronted with the challenge of making use of the benefits achieved in 1994 to promote a long-term process in which family matters can be pursued as priority policy issues. Attaining this objective will require the support of the following:

First, on the basis of the results achieved by the working groups, a long-term family programme is being elaborated; after endorsement by the Austrian Government, it should form a basis of Austria's family policy at the transition to the next millennium.

Secondly, as an accompanying measure, an Institute of Family Research has recently been established, with the task of carrying out relevant research in support of the decision-making process in the field of family policy.

Thirdly, it is intended to maintain the National Committee on a permanent basis as a national coordinating body on family issues.

Fourthly, involvement and participation at the local level has to be further strengthened. For this purpose, the holding of a session of Parliament with the participation of a number of families is planned for the International Day of the Family in 1995. Depending on the outcome, holding this event on a yearly basis is being considered.

Fifthly, grass-root activities will be continued and further developed, with closer cooperation at the local and community level. A new competition will be launched, which will reward community and family activities devoted to the 1995 United Nations Year for Tolerance.

Sixthly, cooperation with the media will be further developed. Television commercials are in production which aim at increased public awareness of the important role of the family as a social network and of the necessity of appropriate support for the family through society.

The achievement of these aims will undoubtedly depend on the extent of international support for the many national efforts in all the Member States of the United Nations. Therefore, it would be desirable that family issues continue to play an important role within the United Nations. Accordingly, the valuable work carried out by the United Nations in connection with the preparation and implementation of the International Year of the Family should be continued.

In this connection, the declaration of a Decade of the Family as well as the adoption of a long-term family policy programme should be discussed as appropriate steps in the continuation and further development of efforts in family policy at the international level.

Programme of work

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: Before calling on the next speaker, I wish to announce that the President of the General Assembly has informed me that action on the draft resolution under agenda item 14, "Report of the International Atomic Energy Agency", will not be taken tomorrow, Wednesday, 19 October, as earlier announced, but rather next week, on a date to be announced in the *Journal*.

Agenda item 95 ***(continued)***

Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

International Conference on Families

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call next on the representative of Germany, Her Excellency Mrs. Roswitha Verhülsdonk, Parliamentary State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for Families and Senior Citizens, who will speak on behalf of the European Union.

Mrs. Verhülsdonk (Germany): I have the honour to address the item on the International Conference on Families on behalf of the European Union.

Although the International Year of the Family is not yet over and although many activities related to the Year are still to come, allow me to congratulate the United Nations on the outstanding attention which the International Year of the Family has received all over the world. Our congratulations and our thanks also go to the Coordinator of the International Year of the Family, Mr. Sokalski, and his team for the relentless efforts they have undertaken to make the Year a success.

The inventory of national action prepared by the secretariat of the International Year of the Family lists an impressive number of events organized at the local and national levels to achieve the goals of the Year. In many countries, national committees have been set up for the purpose of coordinating these activities. Governments have taken stock of the situation of families in their countries by preparing national reports. Furthermore, the International Year of the Family has initiated important research activities concerning family problems. Everywhere, these activities have stimulated efforts at all levels, both in the public and in the private spheres, to respond to problems affecting, and affected by, the situation of families. But despite their variety and their specific focus, all the activities undertaken during the Year have a common effect: taken together, they highlight the importance of families, they promote a better understanding of their functions as well as their problems, they further our knowledge of the economic, social and demographic processes and trends affecting families and their individual members, and they focus attention on the rights, status and responsibilities of all family members.

Families today vary in their forms and functions from one country to another, and within each society. This expresses the diversity of individual preferences as well as of societal conditions. Political, economic, social and demographic developments confront families in all societies with serious problems. In Europe, the following elements contribute to the transformation of family forms and structures: increasing numbers of single-parent households, largely headed by women; the later age of first marriages; a decreasing number of children per family; an increasing number of elderly family members; the growing participation of women in the labour market; and changing perceptions of the role of men and women and of the rights of children within the family - to name but a few current trends.

The varying forms of families in different societies notwithstanding, the International Year of the Family, in our view, declared that the family continues to be the basic unit of society and that therefore the family should be accorded the widest possible protection and assistance. Families play an important role in the socialization, education and protection of children and in the intergenerational transmission of culture and values of social conduct, thus deeply influencing the social behaviour of each individual. Hence, families and their individual members should be afforded the necessary protection.

Policies and measures in this field should be guided by the relevant provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Human Rights, the Declaration on Social Progress and Development, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and the Plan of Action for implementing that Declaration, the family-related provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and other United Nations instruments which refer to the family.

Considerable efforts to further the objectives of the International Year of the Family have also been undertaken at the international level. There were very interesting discussions on the issues of the International Year of the Family at the series of regional preparatory meetings and at the World Forum of non-governmental organizations, held in Malta. The United Nations Europe and North America Preparatory Meeting for the International Year of the Family, held last year in Valletta, Malta, adopted the Valletta Declaration on the principles, objectives and policy considerations of the

International Year of the Family. We consider a number of the recommendations in that Declaration to be of particular importance even beyond the context of the Year. Allow me to mention just a few of them.

A very important point made in the Declaration is the call to alter conditions of work so as to allow family responsibilities to be taken into account. The European Union attaches great importance to finding flexible and innovative arrangements and to implementing effectively existing laws and regulations governing employment, in order to assist workers to reconcile family life and responsibilities on the one hand and gainful employment on the other. This was one of the issues discussed by European Ministers responsible for family affairs at their informal meeting on 15 September 1994 in Berlin. In addition to the 1992 recommendation on child care the European Union is currently considering measures to improve possibilities for parental leave and part-time work. Furthermore, a family and work network consisting of 12 independent expert consultants has been set up to consider these matters further and to initiate action in the public and private sector.

Furthermore, the Declaration points out that efforts to facilitate the reconciliation of family responsibilities and gainful employment have to build on the recognition that family functions and responsibilities must be equally shared between men and women. A division of parental and domestic functions and participation in paid labour formed simply on the basis of gender, as in the past, runs counter to the fundamental principle of the equal status of men and women. Families will therefore greatly benefit from all policies which aim at a new partnership between men and women. The European Union hopes that the fourth World Conference on Women will make concrete proposals in this regard.

We also share the view that the public policy process at all levels of administration as well as in the private and voluntary sector should develop family-sensitive policies in the fields of housing, work, health, social security and education in order to create an environment supportive of families in their various forms. Appropriate consideration should be given to assisting parents and caregivers and families with special needs, including those having insufficient levels of resources or having members with disabilities or elderly persons to care for. In addition, all measures should reflect an understanding of the different ways in which the needs and situation of families and their members change over the life cycle.

Another element which we find particularly important is the call for all States to take the necessary measures to prevent all forms of violence and abuse within families. Family violence is one of the most insidious forms of violence, particularly against women and children. It is committed in all societies. States have to ensure that laws against family violence and abuse, rape, sexual assault and other forms of gender-based violence protect the integrity and dignity of women and children. To this end, we urge all Governments that have not yet done so to ratify and implement fully the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Before concluding, I should like to make one additional remark. I mentioned earlier that the form and concept of the family can vary from one State to another. But whatever form it takes in a given country and whatever the religious and ethical values, cultural backgrounds and philosophical convictions of its people, the European Union believes that relations within the family must be based on respect for the rights and dignity of each of its members. In this context, we would like to recall the contribution to the International Year of the Family by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women which, in its general recommendation on equality in marriage and family relations, has made specific proposals as to how effect can be given to the articles in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women that are of special significance for the status of women in the family.

Looking at the multitude of events, I am convinced that substantial benefits for families can be reaped from the ideas developed during the International Year of the Family. However, this Year has to be seen as an important event within a continuing process. Three major conferences in the next two years, namely the World Summit for Social Development, the Fourth World Conference on Women and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), will address issues which are of great concern also for families. I hope that they will take into due account what has been achieved during the International Year of the Family.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish):* The next speaker is the representative of the Slovak Republic, His Excellency Mr. Dusan Bella, Director-General of the

Multilateral Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic.

Mr. Bella (Slovakia): The Slovak Republic has adopted a complex approach to the International Year of the Family, on both governmental and non-governmental levels.

A particular contribution of the Slovak Government to the International Year of the Family was the launching of a new support programme targeting young families. This coincided with the official visit to Slovakia, on 1 June 1994, of the United Nations Coordinator for the International Year of the Family, Mr. Henryk Sakolski, who was received by the President, the Prime Minister and other high-ranking officials. During 1994, the Slovak National Council adopted several important bills related to the social and economic welfare of families.

Another concrete activity of the Slovak Government was the establishment of the International Centre of Family Studies (ICFS) in Bratislava in 1993, under the joint sponsorship of the Ministry of Labour, Social Welfare and Family and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Thus, the Centre became a focal point not only for national, but also for international activities.

The Centre coordinates a series of research activities at the national and international levels with the aim of assessing the most urgent needs of, and problems related to, the family. As an example, let me mention the international comparative research project: "Possibilities and limits of the family in present-day Europe", or the subregional project (Bratislava - Szeged - Zagreb) on family educational environment. The International Centre for Family Studies has already organized several conferences and workshops with international participation such as, for example: "Ethics in the family and in society", "Families with special problems", "Families in new socio-economic conditions" and "The problems of small countries and their future". The Interregional Meeting of the National Focal Points/Coordinators for IYF, to be held in Bratislava in February 1995, will be the culmination of our activities within the framework of the International Year of the Family.

The International Year of the Family was also an opportunity for a whole range of non-governmental organizations to address family issues through their activities in the educational, cultural, humanitarian, health, population and other fields. The Slovak Catholic Charity opened a new Centre for Family and Education in Bratislava. Children from the Chernobyl area came to spend their holidays with Slovak families. Abundant cultural events, such as a new cycle of family concerts and an exhibition entitled "Child in the Family", have taken place.

The International Centre of Family Studies has been developing its activities in the challenging environment of the changing socio-economic situation of most families in the region against the background of the ongoing transition and reform process.

The broad activities of this Centre have been appreciated by the United Nations Coordinator for the International Year of the Family. A feasibility study on the possibility of affiliating the Centre with the United Nations, in the sense of General Assembly resolution 47/237, elaborated by a United Nations-mandated expert team, took note "with interest of the proposal by the Government of Slovakia that the Bratislava International Centre of Family Studies be affiliated with the United Nations". Currently, the Slovak Government is putting the final touches to the corresponding draft agreement proposed by the United Nations IYF Coordinator. We would highly appreciate friendly support for the affiliation of the International Centre of Family Studies in the very near future. The Centre, having a very advantageous location in close geographical proximity to the United Nations Office in Vienna, could become a useful basis for the future follow-up activities of the International Year for the Family in the region.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish):* I call next on the Permanent Representative of France, Mr. Jean-Bernard Mérimée.

Mr. Mérimée (France) *(interpretation from French):* On 8 December 1989, the General Assembly, in resolution 44/82, proclaimed 1994 the International Year of the Family, thus reaffirming its desire to give social questions the place that the 1945 Charter had reserved for them; ideological confrontations and the search for social progress solely through economic development had led to their being lost sight of.

Three weeks previously, the General Assembly had adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and it was considering holding a world conference on human rights. That was decided the following year, and in 1992 it was decided to convene a World Summit for Social Development. To this important programme one should naturally add the Conference on Population and

Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women, two topics to which the General Assembly regularly draws the attention of the international community.

We all realize the amount of work that these global events involve for Member States and the Organization, and yet everyone buckled down to this common task with vigour and determination. Today we are concentrating on the International Year of the Family, but we must place it in the context of our other endeavours.

France viewed this Year as a special time to reflect on the family and policies for the family, taking two facts into account.

The French are profoundly attached to the family - particularly the young people. A recent Government survey of young people aged 15 to 25, which elicited 1.5 million responses, confirmed all previous studies. Young people place the family at the head of their values. Family ties are what enable them to face more calmly a future that often seems to them uncertain and sometimes even frightening.

Our people clearly accept the importance and legitimacy of intervention by the authorities in support of the family. There are four main reasons for that.

First, the role of the family is acknowledged. Article 16(3) of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

> "The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State."

All French people recognize the validity of this formula, because for them the family has many roles. It is where children learn their rights and their responsibilities; each family member is responsible for the others and watches over the security of the group; natural solidarity is in evidence there, in particular between generations and in favour of the weakest; it is where the common values of our society are passed on; and it is the foundation both of citizenship and of social links. The family is therefore the guarantor of our shared future.

Secondly, individual rights are recognized. No one can doubt that France is committed to the inalienable rights of each individual and that support for families, whatever form that support takes, is provided solely at their option and with respect for the individual rights of each member. This commitment finds expression in particular through the equality of men and women, the rights of children and the determination of families' way of life.

Thirdly, the need for national solidarity is accepted. Family policies reflect a concern for justice and social equilibrium. The solidarity effort is justified by the collective dimension of the family as an institution which is the origin of the renewal of every society. While it is impossible to define "the family", any family, its foundation has always been a man and a woman determined to face the future together and hoping to create life. This essential function of the family must be protected, and in and of itself deserves the solidarity of the nation.

Fourthly, the role of the State is recognized. Partnership and dialogue between the authorities and the family is a longstanding French tradition, which makes it possible to carry out regularly, at both the provincial and national levels, an in-depth assessment of successes, to analyse shortcomings, examine new approaches and consider implementation of the resulting policies.

Our family policies - I deliberately use the plural - have objectives that are constantly adapted to changes in society: allow parents to realize their family plans and thus encourage births; ensure "horizontal" redistribution to compensate for the cost of bringing up children; or ensure "vertical" redistribution, favouring families with the lowest incomes?

In fact, the French Government is jointly pursuing all three objectives within the framework of a comprehensive policy taking account of the aspirations and needs of families of all kinds, because families are at the heart of most public policies.

The International Year of the Family has been an important time for France.

First, as soon as his Government took office in 1993, The Prime Minister, Mr. Edouard Balladur, started work on a five-year law in support of the family, and it was adopted on 25 July 1994. The main provisions of the law, which improves even further our family support measures are:

> Extension of the parental education grant paid to a parent who ceases professional activity to devote himself or herself to the education of an

infant under 3 years. It now goes into effect as of the second child and can be paid if part-time work is involved. If both parents work part-time, two allowances can be paid. From now on, all wage-earners will be guaranteed their job back - or an equivalent job - when parental leave comes to an end.

Training of child-care personnel, working with young children, either individually or in groups;

Improving the right to leave for family reasons;

New measures to support families with young adults to look after or where there have been multiple births or adoption;

Finally, progressive increases in pensions for widows and widowers.

Secondly, we have begun a major national dialogue. The work done by the national Steering Committee of the International Year of the Family and the ensuing action will be described in an official report to be presented on 18 December by the National Coordinator to Mrs. Simone Veil, Secretary of State, Minister for Social Affairs, Health and Urban Development. It will be widely distributed in France and will also be sent to our foreign counterparts and to the Coordinator of the International Year in Vienna. A document summarizing the International Year's progress in France has been made available to delegations today.

In its resolution 47/237 the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit next year specific proposals on the follow-up for the year. An interregional meeting, to be held in Bratislava from 4 to 7 February 1995, will deal with this question.

I have stressed the importance and the interrelationship of our various activities. The World Summit for Social Development and the Beijing Conference will undoubtedly in their turn contribute substantively to our undertaking.

In speaking at length at the beginning of my statement about the basis of family policy in France, I was thinking of the follow-up to the Year. It must respect the following simple principles: recognition of the role of the family; respect for individual rights, including the rights of women; free choice of family lifestyles; support for and protection of the family by society and the State; and partnership with families and their representatives.

Our Assembly has proclaimed 1995 United Nations Year for Tolerance. Tolerance is a noble, vital concept when applied to the family, because it belongs above all in the private domain. While the authorities must show judgement, because families - let us be honest - can also be places of oppression and violence, we must accept differences when they accord with the major principles underlying the legitimacy of our Organization.

Because it is in the family that we place our hopes in the struggle against the rise of individualism, which threatens our societies, we must all make sure that we protect our families. While the follow-up to the Year must naturally be carried out first - and principally - at the national level, our Organization can help by proposing a joint consideration of principles, objectives and methods.

France is resolved to take part in this future work, as it should enable all societies to enter the twenty-first century with a more hopeful outlook.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: The next speaker is the Permanent Representative of Malaysia, Mr. Razali Ismail, on whom I now call.

Mr. Razali (Malaysia): The Malaysian delegation welcomes the declaration of 1994, in recognition of the critical role of the family, as the International Year of the Family. Since 1990 the Malaysian Government has declared 11 November each year Malaysian National Family Day. But taking into account that this is the year the United Nations has designated Year of the Family, the Malaysian Government has agreed to celebrate its National Family Day on 15 May instead of 11 November. In order to observe this important occasion, the Malaysian Government has allocated a budget of about $1 million to finance relevant activities. The activities themselves combine activities of Malaysian National Family Day and those suggested by the United Nations for the International Year of the Family.

The marginalization of the family institution is a serious problem requiring the attention of all societies, in developed as well as developing countries. The pressures exerted on the family are tremendous. The social problems of development, poverty, joblessness and crime, as well as the competing and contradictory pressures that bear down on the individual and the family unit, have contributed to the impairment of the ability of the family institution to perform its functions. We should collectively recognize and address these problems. While

nowadays one may stress the rights and ability of the individual, my delegation believes that it would be wrong to do so at the cost of the attrition of the family as an entity. The individual and the family actually reinforce each other: individual rights complement consensual needs. We see the breakdown of this premise as a contributory factor leading towards serious polarization and challenges to societies, as can be seen in both developing and developed countries.

The incidence of street children, child labour, child prostitution, substance abuse and crimes committed by young people is symptomatic of the breakdown of the family institution, attributable in the main to poverty and unemployment. The threat posed by criminal activities to any society should not be downplayed or underestimated. They have the potential to become a major destabilizing factor in the body politic of States, as well as for the international community.

The family is the building block of society. The role of the family in ensuring that human beings will enjoy a productive life in a secure and safe environment, in harmony with nature, is paramount. The family remains the most natural emotional, economic and security support for each and every individual. For us in Malaysia, as in other places, the family is at the heart of an extended human relationship that must survive the process of our development and evolution and not be its casualty. Many societies long ago lost the ability to recognize and further nurture the family as the confluence of reconciliation, healing and motivation. We regret that this has come about and that in some societies there is a sense of being adrift.

The experience that one goes through in everyday family life will shape one's character, attitude, demeanour, moral persuasion and various other human traits that ultimately condition the way one interacts with the social and physical environment. The vital functions of the family include the upbringing of the young, through both formal and informal education. Indeed, there is mounting evidence that the young traditionally learn most from their families.

The role of a family is not confined merely to the upbringing of the young. The family remains central in taking care of the elderly as well. In fact, world-wide, Governments are expected to face a serious problem pertaining to the care of the elderly, especially the poor, the frail and the destitute. The family has an instrumental role to play in reducing the burden of the State in the care of the family. This ancient family role must be preserved and promoted. This will contribute to the strengthening of the family as an institution.

There are numerous measures that we can take, individually and collectively, to strengthen the institution of the family. Nationally, Governments should look seriously into implementing agreements reached at various international conferences, such as the recently concluded International Conference on Population and Development. Issues relating to family violence, child abuse, child care, care of the disabled and the elderly, education, health care, the care of orphans, housing and basic amenities are closely linked to the integrity of the family institution, and they need to be addressed in that context.

Many pressures felt by families today, including the high cost of education, health care and basic amenities, are the result of unbridled and unsustainable development. These problems often have severe negative repercussions on families. Governments therefore have a moral obligation and a social responsibility to intervene and ensure that the basic necessities remain within the reach of ordinary people.

In dealing with the issue of the family, we have to address squarely the status and role of women. In many societies women have been the unacknowledged pillars of the family. Emotionally and physically, they provide succour and sustenance to the family, and in many cases they are the breadwinners as well. Society has to come to grips with the problems of women by devising institutional means to alleviate their burden, which will consequently enhance the integrity of the family.

Like others, we remain concerned over the increasing incidence of women as single parents. The hardship and, indeed, the misery of these women must be acknowledged and alleviated through the provision of legal and financial support so that these families will continue to survive. An essential feature of support for women must have, as its central focus, education. The education of women is one way to enhance their status to ensure that they can react to changing socio-economic situations and be aware of the full extent of their rights and role within society.

The international community will have the opportunity to address again the issue of strengthening the family institution at the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development. The issues which form the core interest of the Summit - namely, poverty, employment

and social integration - are directly related to the important role and function of the family. Poverty and unemployment often cripple the ability of families in producing healthy, balanced individuals.

The United Nations, through such agencies as the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Development Programme, has been instrumental in helping developing countries to provide essential services to the people, thereby indirectly supporting the family structure. These agencies must continue to do so. In fact, their activities must increase. To enable an increase in these activities, it is imperative that they have the resources. Donor countries should in fact increase their contributions to fund these agencies, rather than reducing their contributions as current trends would seem to indicate.

My delegation also believes that non-governmental organizations have a major role to play in alleviating the pressures on families. Together with Governments and the local people, non-governmental organizations can play an important role in maintaining and, where possible, strengthening the role of families. This is particularly important for non-governmental organizations from the South, which must work together with Governments to improve the lot of the people. There is wide and ample scope for constructive interaction and engagement.

In conclusion, as mankind proceeds inexorably to improve its standard and quality of life, it goes without saying that the process must ensure the integrity and relevance of the family. The well-being of the family is the bedrock of the international community as well.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I now call on The Honourable Mr. Antonio Guidi, Minister for the Family and Social Solidarity of Italy.

Mr. Guidi (Italy) *(spoke in Italian; English text furnished by the delegation)*: Let me begin by thanking the United Nations and the Coordinator of the International Year of the Family, Mr. Henryk Sakolski for organizing this International Conference on the Family. While fully supporting the statement made by my German colleague on behalf of the European Union, I should like to add my country's reflections on the crucial issue of the family.

Anyone who has had prolonged professional contact with disability is well-acquainted with the phenomenon of those who either isolate themselves or become stubborn. I may not have great or original ideas but I am certainly stubborn, and with stubbornness I will reconsider in my statement certain terms that are used and abused. To have any impact on reality, they require continued use as well as effort on the part of both the speaker and the listener.

At the moment of making a decision, I often remember a motto I read years ago in the margins of a letter from the United Nations Fund for Population Activities: "Today's choices for tomorrow's world." This reminds me of the great responsibility we all assume each day in working for the sake of future generations. Whoever wrote that motto in 1969 showed an awareness and foresight that has grown more relevant through time. Unfortunately, all too few people have made this intuition their own over the years.

I believe that the United Nations showed the same awareness and foresight in proclaiming 1994 the International Year of the Family. This is the same year as the Cairo Conference on Population and Development and the preparations for next year's Beijing Conference on Women. In both Conferences, the central role of the family emerges as a reality at the crossroads of all the problems of modern society.

The Cairo Conference reaffirmed the family as the natural and fundamental nucleus of society, with the right to be protected by society and the State, as postulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It then showed the world how the family - in the many forms reflecting the various social, cultural and political systems in which it exists and develops - is currently going through a period of serious moral and material hardship. And the first people to be penalized by this hardship are children, the elderly and women, which can be three extremely vulnerable categories in the current social context.

The child, as the United Nations Children's Fund often points out, is the subject most affected by society's shortcomings. In poor societies, imbalances in demographics and resources are created that generate severe hardships affecting a child's expectations of life, such as education, health and even dreams. Even in advanced economies, children are often penalized and forced to make serious sacrifices, such as a significant reduction in their living space, less and less time from the adult and, in extreme cases, the loss of one parent.

It is my hope, and the social struggles of my country are testimony to the fact, that in planning and making laws on children, we operate no longer from the adult's perspective but from the minor's. I ask this Assembly to reflect on the conditions of children who live in war zones. In the past 10 years, 1.5 million children have lost their lives in armed conflicts; 4 million have remained disabled; 5 million are refugees; and 12 million have been uprooted from their home communities.

This list of facts shows us the dimensions of a phenomenon that I consider both terrifying and unworthy of a civil humanity, a humanity that should be a "parent", as the Pope said on the International Day of Families, quoting Genesis:

> "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. In this union they transmit life to new human beings: they become parents. In this way they take part in the creative power."

In 1990, at the World Summit for Children, 150 Governments signed a Declaration that guaranteed respect for truces and special relief corridors for children in violent, war-torn lands. These concepts were raised and broadened by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which also contains the proclamation of the right of all children to basic health care, food and education.

I hope that in the current year Governments that have not yet signed the Declaration will do so, thereby allowing for its full application.

But the *niños de rua* - the *little slaves* - of some zones in Asia are also fighting a daily war. This is a war that consists of daily shortages and continuous abuses of power, and it is far from over. Unfortunately, it is now being extended to economically advanced countries that were considered immune. It too requires the drafting of an international treaty: How much is the life of a child worth?

Cairo conjugated development in the feminine, as I said there. But women, whom the Egyptian President Mubarak called "the cornerstone of our society", represent the second vulnerable element within the family. Since it is within our power, it is our duty to guarantee women certain rights, namely education and health care.

One fundamental point of reference is the issue of equal opportunity for men and women. Today, in many countries and situations, the roles within the family and the society are too rigid. It is thus necessary to appreciate a woman's work in the family and even consider the possibility of paying her a salary; at the same time, it is indispensable to facilitate her entry into the work world and protect her from every type of social discrimination. The Government Commission for Equal Opportunity established in Italy is working from this perspective.

I hope that the participants in the upcoming Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing can reach a general consensus on these principles and draft precise recommendations on the condition of women.

What do we do for the elderly? I am referring to all those who, having reached what their society considers an advanced age, are unjustly relegated to the sidelines. The main problems regarding the elderly can be summarized under four headings: quality of life, health services, guarantee of employment for as long as the individual can or wishes to work, and integration into the family. Taking care of the elderly is a duty towards those who in the recent past bore the weight of our society on their shoulders. But it also and specifically meets the challenge of civility.

Thus, in part through the creation of a system of social support, we must restore the elderly to a central position within the family framework. This would enrich young people by teaching them to appreciate those who by their example, dignity, experience and culture can provide certainty in the present and guidance in the future. And if an elderly person has no family, or has a family that cannot maintain him or her within its nucleus, the State must shoulder the responsibility for the creation of small structures that interact with the territory and the population.

In Italy, we have recently witnessed a significant demographic drop caused by a tangible decrease in births. This culminated in 1993 with fewer births than deaths. I believe that the low birth rate is caused in part by the employment problem: Italy is one of the countries with the longest waiting period between the end of a person's studies and the beginning of his or her work activity. Another reason is the difficulty in finding housing and the scarce economic opportunities. There are also reasons that are not material, such as little faith in the future, lack of control over one's immediate situation, and the current trend of young couples' regarding a child as a curb on their freedom.

My goal has always been to make people understand that a child represents the best investment for the future. To this end, with full respect for the individual's right to choose whether or not to have a child, I feel it is indispensable to implement a series of tax breaks for a person who decides to have one.

One phenomenon of great current interest is the increasing number of families with one parent and one child. This particular reality is very difficult for both the adult, who is often exposed and alone, and the child, who is the focus of all the adult's affection. The child cannot share this affection with other children in a society that tends to separate individuals, or with brothers and sisters, or with the other parent.

Allow me to refer to what I regard as the ideal family, even it is difficult to put together. I call it the "long" family. It can respond to the many needs of a growing child through the daily commitment of the couple and the precious support of the elderly - I do not wish to be nostalgic but to look towards a possible future. This family must treat, prevent, and settle social hardships - a trustee of the highly delicate task of educating minors and protecting the elderly and the disabled.

The "long" family can in fact help solve the emergency of solitude: the solitude of the elderly person, who is ever more marginalized, and of the child, who is listened to less and less. Such a family can give voice to children and space to the elderly, demonstrating that the solution to this shared emergency can simply be to bring both age groups together again.

Today, thanks to technology, but thanks especially to an increasing awareness, the erroneous conviction that the disabled cannot compete in social life is changing. Although this has allowed the less severely disabled to be integrated into society and to express their potential, it has not given everyone the same opportunity. In fact, at this moment in the world there are millions and millions of prisoners. They are not victims of unjust regimes or of wars. They are the severely handicapped, prisoners of themselves and of their homes and of their cities. Part of the reason I am here today is to ask Governments to make it a priority to act on behalf of these people and at the same time to recognize them as a social resource of humanity.

The problem of reuniting the families of immigrants leads inevitably to what emerged in Cairo as one of the main problems facing humanity in the near future, namely, immigration.

The solution to this problem must be sought in a transnational framework, through a gradual rebalancing of individual national economies and in full respect for the social and cultural independence of populations. Immigration will cease to be a problem only on the day when each State can guarantee acceptable living conditions to the citizens within its borders.

I think that it is unacceptable today to talk about "us" and "them", to distinguish between the various populations that inhabit the Earth. The foreigner must be treated as a friend and, as such, as a possible resource for the host country. Until this happens, one of the problems posed by immigration will be the reuniting of families, which is a fair expectation and a right for the millions of emigrants who honestly pursue the dream of bettering their conditions of life by working in a foreign land.

In Italy we have adopted measures to create a system of rights and duties that respect human dignity. These measures are designed to pursue and punish the minority of immigrants who live outside the law and at the same time to guarantee a better standard of living to others. This can be done in part through the utilization of social services, the acquisition of civil rights and the possibility of reuniting their families.

Going back to what I said in Cairo, I propose the inclusion of immigration-related issues in the agenda of the next meeting of the G-7, in Canada. At the same time I propose, as I did then, the organization of a world conference on the issue.

I would also like to renew the proposal I made for a conference on volunteerism, to be organized by Italy and to be held in the near future.

It is my conviction that volunteerism should be understood as a strong, founding value of a civil and unselfish society. It should be praised as a model for overcoming hardship in a population otherwise lacking in ideological points of reference. Volunteerism is also a response to shortcomings in the public sector and plays a role, for example, in the creation of very important centres for drug addicts, the handicapped and abandoned children. We must thus work to appreciate these functions and restore equal dignity to these systems, which must not be alternatives to public systems.

Volunteerism is true treasure, and it will constitute one of the fundamental values of the year 2000.

I feel great sadness when I realize that people today no longer dream the impossible dream. But I am glad that they seek instead a justice with human dimensions, an end to violence and the fulfilment of primary needs - all rights that should be concrete, natural and universal.

In this context I give great importance to the proclamation of 1995 as the United Nations Year for Tolerance. Through a series of initiatives like those for the Year of the Family, which is officially concluding today, that Year will prompt a series of reflections by Governments and mankind on the true values on which to base the future development of our society and individual life. The first of these is solidarity.

My hope as Italy's Minister for the Family is that in the near future, through solidarity, old and new self-interests and ethnic, social and religious hatred can be overcome to achieve that superior good to which we aspire, namely, peace.

Whoever looks at reality without truly seeing it cannot understand. A child, a person in trouble or a small unfamiliar group of people may look like imperfect, discolored and useless pebbles in such a person's eyes. If we step back, however, broadening our perspective and adjusting our vision, we realize that these little pebbles make up a fascinating mosaic. Each of them has the right to exist, to be a part of that tormented, splendid, contradictory mosaic of humanity. Here, in this forum, where all voices are heard, it must come together and be seen in its totality. Each one must have a role and be heard. We will no longer need someone to speak for another and another to hear. No later than tomorrow - or even today - we must enter into a mode of communication in which we will all have equal dignity of voice, tone and role.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish):* I now call on Mr. Win Mra, Permanent Representative of Myanmar.

Mr. Mra (Myanmar): With its adoption of resolution 44/82 of 8 December 1989, the General Assembly proclaimed 1994 as the International Year of the Family. This proclamation is important in that, by making it, the United Nations was for the first time drawing the attention of the international community to the special needs and importance of the family. The resolution reaffirmed the importance of the family as the most basic unit of society. It also reawakened the international community to the role of the family in contemporary society and to the challenges it faces as a result of political, economic and social changes. This is the most fitting occasion to examine the challenges brought about by these changes and to formulate appropriate strategies.

Since the proclamation, we have seen the smooth implementation of a well coordinated and effective preparatory process. We can say with a sense of satisfaction that the preparatory process has succeeded in promoting the objectives of the Year and has resulted in crystallization of the substantive concerns regarding families. Consequently, we find ourselves today poised to embark on follow-up activities.

One of the principles underlying the International Year of the Family is the need to undertake the activities of the Year at all levels - local, national, regional and international, with the primary focus at the local and national levels. Only with sustained effort at these two levels can the family regain its pivotal role in ensuring the well-being of society. Today is the most opportune time to take stock of activities at the national level.

In the Union of Myanmar many activities were undertaken during the preparatory stage - activities such as organizing child-development centres; holding contests for children and giving prizes to the winners; and arranging ceremonies for cash donations towards observance of the International Day of Families. Arrangements to coordinate departments' observance of the International Day of the Family were made in April 1994. Non-governmental organizations were invited to take part, in accordance with the objectives of the International Year of the Family. The theme and the motto of the Year were translated into the Myanmar language, and both the English and the Myanmar versions were published in local newspapers. All activities were broadcast by Myanmar Television, beginning on 12 May 1994.

Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 47/237, the International Day of Families was observed in Myanmar on 15 May 1994 under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement. A special ceremony was held to observe the Day, at which the Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement gave an account of the principles and objectives of the International Year of the Family. Those attending included officials of the World Health Organization, the

United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund; heads of departments and enterprises; representatives of the Women's Sports Federation, the Myanmar Red Cross Society, the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association, the Myanmar Writers and Journalists Association and the Union Solidarity and Development Association; and members of the Red Cross Brigade.

The highlights of the ceremony were the reading of the message sent by the United Nations on the occasion of the International Day of Families; presentations by the President of the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association and the Chairman of the Myanmar Writers and Journalists Association on the International Year of the Family; and the presentation of prizes to the winners of the children's painting contests that had been held earlier. A commemorative theme song composed for the Year was also broadcast by Myanmar television on 15 May 1994.

In Myanmar the family is traditionally a close-knit social unit. It usually consists of three generations of the family living under one roof - children, parents and grandparents. In addition, the predominant religion, culture and traditions of the land require that the family remain a cohesive unit for the development of the children and for their nurturing through proper upbringing.

While caring for its other dependants, the family is mainly responsible for the growth and development of its most vulnerable members - infants and children. The Myanmar family structure is conducive to this role. Children are the object and focus of parental and grandparental love. By tradition and culture, as well as by law, the rights of the child are conscientiously and scrupulously respected. Myanmar has always had legislation to protect children - for example, the Young Offenders Act 1930 and the Children Act 1955.

On 16 July 1991 Myanmar acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As a State party, Myanmar has accepted a formal obligation to recognize and protect the broad range of rights provided for in the Convention. On 14 July 1993 Myanmar enacted new legislation on children and repealed obsolete laws.

The aims of the new legislation are as follows: to implement the rights of the child as recognized in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; to protect the rights of the child; to ensure that children may fully enjoy their rights under the law; to make provision for protection of the best interests of the child, taking into account the financial resources of the State; to ensure that the custody and care of children in need of protection and care may be undertaken by the State or by voluntary social workers or non-governmental organizations; and to make provision for the separate trial of juvenile offenders and for the reform of children who have committed offences.

Under the new legislation, a child in the custody of a cruel or wicked parent or guardian is defined as being in need of protection and care, and the State is required to intervene to protect the rights of such a child.

The Myanmar Government's multifaceted measures to ensure the nation's development have resulted in an expansion of social services. This is the outcome of innovative social policies that address the needs of families. These social services are being provided, not only by the Government, but also by non-governmental organizations.

The roles and functions of the family have changed, principally as a result of economic modernization and of moral degradation and its concomitant circumstances. However, the fundamental character of the family as the natural framework for providing its individual members with emotional, financial and material support remains largely unaffected. How to safeguard this basic character against the onslaught of contemporary pressures is the challenge with which the international community is now confronted.

In developing countries, where formal social security systems are inadequate - indeed, in some cases such systems do not exist - the family and the community are the two entities that can provide individual social security. It is therefore important for the developing countries to maintain and strengthen the existing family structures and to promote the community spirit until such time as the State can afford an adequate and sustainable social security system. My delegation believes that this is an area in which the international community could complement efforts at the national level.

For their part, the developing countries should have as components of their social policies plans and programmes to uphold the traditional values that underpin the cohesiveness of the family. Mutual respect, understanding, consideration and tolerance should be nurtured and upheld at schools. Any future strategy must encourage the instillation of these time-tested values.

Mr. Abdellah (Tunisia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The International Year of the Family is one event within a continuous process and accordingly its observance should not be an end in itself. It should constitute an important starting-point in a long-term process. It will be pointless unless the proclamation of 1994 as the International Year of the Family and all the activities which the international community has relentlessly undertaken from the preparatory phase to the present lead to well-conceived strategies beneficial to families. In drawing up these strategies, jettisoning of the obsolete concepts should be balanced with the maintenance of the concepts and family models that still tend to contribute to the strengthening of the family as a basic unit of society. My delegation fully supports the Secretary-General's plans to have appropriate follow-up strategies ready for timely submission to the fiftieth session of the General Assembly.

The President *(interpretation from French):* I now call on Mr. Juan Carlos Mato, Director-General for the Legal Protection of Minors, Ministry of Social Affairs of Spain.

Mr. Mato (Spain) *(interpretation from Spanish):* While fully supporting the statement made by the representative of Germany on behalf of the European Union, I should like to add to his statement a few general assessments and views which we, from the Spanish standpoint, deem worthy of pointing out in the framework of this debate, appropriately taking place in the General Assembly.

The celebration of the International Year of the Family does credit to the United Nations, in particular if we assess the impact the Year has had on the international community, especially at the region, national and local levels. A decisive contribution was made during the preparatory process by the Coordinator for the International Year of the Family, Mr. Sokalski. Special mention should also be made of the considerable work carried out by the various committees of the non-governmental organizations on the family, in particular the work of the Vienna Committee for the preparation of the World Non-Governmental Organization Forum, held in Valletta, and other activities of particular importance.

The conclusions of the regional preparatory meeting for the International Year of the Family for the countries of Europe and North America, as well as General Assembly resolution 47/237, continue to be points of reference for seeking common ground among various approaches to the family, its role in the society at the end of the century, the public policies involved, and the role to be played by non-governmental organizations.

As we near the year 2000, the family continues to be seen as the basic unit of society in light of the key functions it plays at the heart of inter-generational solidarity, and as the emotional, economic and material support its members need for their proper growth and development.

The family as an entity cannot be said *a priori* to be "finished" in a more or less defined way, nor do its functions appear to have been established once and for all. On the contrary, it is seen as a constantly evolving, multifaceted and dynamic reality, a producer of changes but also affected by those changes. It is a social framework whose role and functions cannot be seen as exclusively private units, but rather as public units in constant interaction with demographic, cultural, political, legal and economic phenomena.

A clear recognition of the important social and economic functions of the family has made us increasingly aware of the effects changes in social structure and in economic activity have had on the nature of what we today call a family, at times changing the ties and links which bind its members and even reducing the family's capacity to satisfy basic needs. These changes have opened our eyes to the existence of many different kinds of family units. That is why in our policies having to do with the family, we should attempt to avoid an explicit or implicit promotion of a single ideal picture of the family, and avoid basing these policies exclusively on stereotypes and models of the family that do not reflect existing realities as a whole.

From sociological data, we can conclude that the institution of the family plays a central role in the renewed Spanish society at the end of this century. Family life has received very high marks in surveys on well-being. What is most interesting is the fact that these well-being indicators are independent of other social variables such as schooling, income and social class.

Undoubtedly the family is the first educational environment in which an active and prolonged process of socialization, learning and transfer of culture takes place. Within the family, one can begin to promote true equality of opportunity for girls and boys to have access to culture, knowledge and democratic values.

The society and the State must provide the necessary environment and resources for families to exercise this basic responsibility, while themselves fulfilling their own responsibilities by ensuring universal, accessible, quality education and thus promoting equal access to opportunities. This, moreover, involves educational policies aimed at ensuring the effective participation of families, children and teenagers in the educational community.

Similar measures are also required for the protection and promotion of mothers in such areas as labour law and health policy, to make mother-child health services, family planning, and early detection and treatment for the disabled universally available and accessible.

Equality between men and women in the decision-making process, an equitable sharing of family tasks and responsibilities at home, as well as the effective achievement of democracy and equality in the public sphere, are closely linked to the process of promoting the individuality and autonomy of women. The driving force for change in the role played by women in our societies has been the involvement of women in the work place. This has been an essential element in the development of society, as was made clear at the Conference on Population and Development.

Therefore, meeting the new challenges of the modern family requires promoting all of its members through public policies which will facilitate, among other things, a balance between family and work life.

Establishing individual needs and those of the family as a group in organizing daily family life will guarantee that families can function. It is the basis for sustaining a new social covenant in the private sector, a covenant between men and women, between children and adults, between the elders and the other members of the family - a family covenant.

The International Year of the Family is serving as a platform for the development of a wide-ranging discussion in Spanish society and in Spanish institutions of the new role that the family has in these times, on demographic factors, on relations between the individual, the family and society, and on legislation that affects families.

The Spanish Parliament has never had such intensive and important work to do as it has this year on policies affecting families and on the control to be exercised by the Government in this area. A parliamentary working group on family policy has been set up. Experts, non-governmental organizations and political heads of ministries that have the most to do with family policies have appeared before that working group. The results of this work will be reflected in requests by the Congress to the Government.

The Senate has requested the Government to establish an inter-ministerial working group to draft a report on the situation of one-parent families in Spain and draw up proposals to improve the most difficult social situations. Furthermore, the Government is setting in motion a range of family-policy measures, some of which I have already referred to. Similarly, progress has been made in some autonomous and local administrations.

Moreover, in connection with the celebration of the International Year of the Family, a National Committee has been set up in which experts, non-governmental organizations and representatives of the Central Administration, autonomous communities and local administrations are participating.

As regards substantive commitments, in the light of the purposes and principles which the United Nations has proposed for the International Year of the Family, we have drafted a Plan of Action which includes the contributions of the members of the National Committee. This Plan establishes the goals of campaigns to promote communications, awareness and exchanges of information during the International Year of the Family which have been developed in Spain.

The International Year has already left a legacy for our families, our societies, our public administrations and our non-governmental organizations. It has been an opportunity for non-governmental organizations to be more visible in our societies and for Governments to take a more active interest in the needs and expectations of families.

The activities connected with the International Year of the Family should be appropriately reflected in the activities of the United Nations, and should be in keeping with the important role families play in our societies. In any event, one line of future strategy will be the inclusion of the family perspective in activities carried out by the bodies and agencies of the United Nations system. In this approach, the personal and social development of all the members of the family should be taken into account.

We firmly support the decision by the United Nations inter-agency meeting that the slogan of the

celebration in 1995 of the International Day of Families should be: "Tolerance Begins in the Family".

Finally, in drawing activities complementing the International Year we should take into account the reports that will be made at the focal-point meeting of the International Year of the Family in Bratislava at the beginning of next year, the statements on the family made at the International Conference on Population and Development, and the results that may emerge from the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women.

The results of these international meetings will be of extreme importance in highlighting the importance of the family at the end of this decade, as we look to the future. However, of equal importance is our resolve to make progress at the regional, national and local levels in improving the status and promoting the quality of life of the family in our societies.

The President *(interpretation from French)*: I now call on the representative of Canada, Ms. Nancy Kilgour Carr, Federal Coordinator for the International Year of the Family.

Ms. Kilgour Carr (Canada): Canada is proud to say that it has taken an active role in celebrating the International Year of the Family. In our country, international years have often been milestones in the development of public policy and social action. However, to achieve that impact they must belong to Canadian society as a whole - its governments, institutions and communities. Only that can create the broadly based effort needed to focus attention on the issues that define the Year and the progress we can make as a people.

That inclusive approach has been the policy of the Government of Canada to the International Year of the Family. Canada is a large and diverse land. At a governmental level we are a federation in which all provinces, territories and municipalities have programmes, services and policies that affect families. After all, Canada is made up of millions of different families. All these factors underline the value of reaching out to enlist wide support for the International Year of the Family.

Since the decision of the General Assembly to designate 1994 as the International Year of the Family, Canada has taken action on many fronts. Our international commitment has taken forms such as the decision to fund a staff person at the International Year of the Family secretariat in Vienna for a three-year period.

The Government of Canada recognizes the importance of families and is committed to providing a variety of programmes to support and enhance the well-being of families. The federal presence in the International Year of the Family is the Federal Secretariat for the International Year of the Family. It coordinates and promotes International Year of the Family activities and initiatives across federal departments and agencies - for example, public awareness, research, and working in partnership with other levels of government and non-governmental organizations - all for the betterment of families. A major component of the Secretariat's strategy has been participation in major family-related conferences, such as the one held in Victoria, British Columbia, on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Under the theme "Stronger Children - Stronger Families", 800 international delegates were drawn from all sectors of society to discuss issues arising from the Convention. They looked at the needs of children in situations of emergency, basic health and welfare needs, children and youth with disabilities, and a host of other issues.

In addition to the federal government's work, individual provinces and territories have formed groups or assigned staff to promote International Year of the Family activities within their own jurisdictions.

The leading non-governmental organization has been the Canada Committee for the International Year of the Family. The federal government provided funds to establish this independent, non-governmental organization in 1992. It has a board of directors made up of 32 distinguished Canadians. Since its creation, it has been active in forming partnerships with other non-governmental organizations and business, labour and community organizations.

I could cite many examples of the Committee's work, particularly through its partnership with other family-related non-governmental organizations. The Committee developed The Work and Family Challenge Programme to make employers more aware of the realities of balancing work and family responsibilities. It commissioned a survey of public opinion on families and family life. It developed a learning and study guide about Canadian families that was distributed to all

Canadian elementary school principals. As important, it has encouraged innumerable events at the community level. We can say with confidence that Canadian non-governmental organizations have played an active role in promoting the International Year of the Family.

Last week, in collaboration with the United Nations International Year of the Family secretariat, the Canada Committee for the International Year of the Family, in conjunction with three Canadian non-governmental organizations, hosted "Today's Families: A Bridge to the Future", the closing conference for the Year. In his keynote address to this conference, held in Montreal, the Prime Minister of Canada, the Right Honourable Jean Chrétien, underlined the importance of strong families to society and the obligation Governments have to support them. The Conference itself laid out many of the issues that we must face long after the Year draws to a close. One result of the Montreal conference is the non-governmental statement about follow-up to the important work that has been accomplished through the Year. That non-governmental document was presented here today.

Some of the issues discussed in Montreal also form part of the agenda of the International Conference on Population and Development. Canada endorses the progressive recommendations that resulted from the Conference and supports the Programme of Action agreed to in Cairo. In particular, we believe that improving the conditions of women and empowering them with choices will help to build better families, better societies and a better world.

In the same way, we look forward to the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women, to take place in 1995. Canada believes that both conferences will benefit from the attention we have paid to the needs of families and all their members this year.

One of the most tangible effects of an international year is its influence on public policy. In recent months, the Government of Canada has taken a series of steps that will help benefit families. On 26 July, the Minister of Health, the Honourable Diane Marleau, announced the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Programme. This Programme will support comprehensive, community-based efforts to provide food supplementation, nutrition and lifestyle counselling to pregnant women with a high risk of low-birth-weight babies. This Programme will help give the smallest, most vulnerable members of a family the healthiest start possible in life.

On 5 October, the Federal Government released a discussion paper in which the Canadian people are asked to help set contemporary social security priorities. For more than 50 years Canadians have developed a large network of social programmes, and yet too many people find themselves without the help they need to adapt to a changing economy. One result has been an increase in child poverty. Another has been an increase in the number of families at the margins of our economy and society. The Government of Canada believes a government committed to stronger families must work to address these issues. It is committed to doing so.

The impact of the International Year of the Family will be felt in years to come through these issues and decisions in both the private and the public sectors. Canadians have told us that families are important. They expect all parts of society to work together to support families. Canada is proudly taking on that challenge.

The President: I call on Her Excellency, the Honourable Isabelle Leeds, United States of America Alternate Representative to the Forty-Ninth Session of the United Nations, General Assembly.

Mrs. Leeds (United States of America): The United States strongly supports protecting and strengthening the family as a basic social and economic unit. I would like to make a brief statement to describe the focus of some of the programmes in the United States leading up to the International Year of the Family.

The family provides the environment within which the next generation is born, sheltered, nourished and educated. Mothers and fathers must nourish the child with food and love, protect the child from harm, ensure that the child is cared for when ill, and provide the child's early education. The concern, therefore, is not only for children but for the capacity of parents to provide adequate care and stimulation for their children.

In the United States, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the United States Department of Health and Human Services has been the designated Federal Government coordinator for the International Year of the Family. Promoting the economic and social well-being of families, children and communities is the heart of the mission of the ACF.

Through its federal leadership, the ACF works to empower families and individuals to increase their economic independence. The ACF works also to develop supportive communities with a positive impact on the quality of life and development of people.

The ACF accomplishes its mission in partnerships with many others such as frontline workers, communities, states and native American communities, all joining together with one vision in mind: helping others.

Programmes and services administered by the ACF include: Aid to Families with Dependent Children, the nation's largest cash assistance programme; Head Start, a comprehensive child development programme for pre-school children; Family Preservation and Family Support to assist families in crisis; and the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program, the nation's education and job- training programme for welfare recipients along with 60 other groups providing services to individuals and families in need.

Other departments and agencies of the Federal and state governments have undertaken specific measures to promote the Year, including the Extension System of the United States Department of Agriculture, which developed a three-year plan of action for thc year, the Library of Congress, the United States Agency for International Development and the Peace Corps.

The Extension System organized a national task force made up of Extension professionals and representatives from the private sector. The task force adopted three goals from the United Nations publication on the International Year of the Family as themes in focusing its own work programme. These goals were: first, strengthening the family's ability to meet its own needs; secondly, understanding how families are affected by changes in publicly provided social services; and thirdly, recognizing that some of society's ills may adversely affect family relationships and acknowledging that government intervention through social policy may be needed to modify negative behaviour and discourage antisocial or detrimental practices in the family.

The national, state and local International Year of the Family educational programmes of the Extension System were implemented with an initiative that engendered a new focus on the family, and events that ensured continued attention to the welfare of the family.

The importance of the family system in all societies was also recognized by the United States Agency for International Development, which has adopted a closer focus on the role of the family in development. This approach to development is based on the premise that successful development must put people first through reflecting and responding to the realities and dynamics of daily life, which are most keenly felt at the level of the family and household.

Traditionally, development experts used gross national product statistics or numbers of targeted beneficiaries to measure the impact of their programmes. The result of this focus on macro-level statistics or individual interventions is that the family system, its role in society and its effect on individuals tend to be overlooked. Because there are many different family systems throughout the world, and even within countries, it is important to approach the design and implementation of programmes with an analysis of how intra-family relationships and gender roles influence the allocation of resources to individuals.

Focusing on families also highlights the fact that most people operate as members of family systems, not as isolated individuals. The betterment strategies of many households depend on maximizing the productive use of family resources, often across intergenerational lines.

It is within families that most individuals are nurtured, sheltered, educated and allocated resources. It is within the family that many decisions, often difficult ones, are made - whether or not to vaccinate a child; how long a child attends school; whether to invest in a business or spend on health and education. Health, housing, income, education and other social and economic factors are all interrelated, and it is within the family system that they come together.

We believe that focusing attention at the level of the family lets us see the interrelated needs of people so that assistance both at home and abroad can respond to their needs and priorities, rather than reflecting primarily the "solutions" of development specialists. It means building on the strengths and the potential of families, respecting their strategies for self-improvement and the rights of all family members.

Furthermore, focusing on intra-family dynamics and their influence on the lives of the family members is fundamental to sustainable development. Development is

based on understanding how resources are allocated within the household, who controls the resources, who makes the decisions, and why.

Today, many families are faced with stress as a result of poverty, disasters, disease, war or pandemics. Although families are resilient and have developed coping strategies when faced with adversity, many become so overwhelmed that they are no longer able to cope. The millions of children orphaned by AIDS or forced to work rather than go to school, or who are living or working on the street, are manifestations of stress on family systems.

Initiatives at all levels, national and international, governmental and non-governmental, need to enable families to have access to more and better choices for their own futures. As consumers of services such as family planning, education, water and sanitation, housing and banking, family members make difficult decisions every day regarding how they and their families will live.

Government policies in different sectors must provide the kind of environment within which families, whatever their structures, can not only survive but flourish. The knowledge and experience of non-governmental organizations are an invaluable resource. Often working in local communities, these organizations implicitly understand the fact that the needs of individuals are influenced by their family's resources, decisions and dynamics. Intra-household dynamics - what goes on within the family - influence not only who benefits, but ultimately whether the family's potential is realized.

For no matter what a family unit looks like today, the family remains the essential ingredient in shaping our later lives. All children need the love and support that only caring parents, caring adults can provide. As First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton said in recent remarks to a graduating university class,

> "Family values alone cannot feed a hungry child, and material security cannot provide a moral compass. We need both. We need both within our families. We need both within our societies".

Two major United Nations events will take place next year: the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women. These events, auspiciously occurring in the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, will provide the opportunity to keep the international spotlight on the family, and we hope that official documents now being drafted for these events will recognize the important role of the family in the social and economic development of all people.

For now, before the International Year of the Family comes to a close, let us all take the time to show our own families how much we cherish them, and to remember the needs of families everywhere.

The President (*interpretation from French*): I call next on Her Excellency Mrs. Josefina Bilbao, Minister of the National Women's Service of Chile.

Mrs. Bilbao (Chile) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I am honoured to represent Chile before the Assembly, for it was the wish of President Eduardo Frei to entrust the National Women's Service with the task of coordinating and implementing all activities involving women and promotion of the family as the key to the nation's overall development. After chairing the national Commission for the Family established by former President Patrizio Aylwin to carry out an in-depth study of the family in Chile and to prepare extensive diagnosis of the subject, I was appointed by President Frei to head this Ministry. I am therefore in a position to say that for my Government the United Nations proclamation of the International Year of the Family was not merely timely but far-sighted, both for my country and for the entire international community.

We believe that the 1989 meeting marked a substantive advance in the promotion of human dignity and that it was far-sighted because the world has changed rapidly since 1989. In only half a decade a new international order has arisen. Its form is not yet clear, but we know that it brings with it advances in freedom and cooperation; that the banners of democracy and human rights will be held high; that globalization will rise to unimagined levels; that markets will expand; and that international security will be more firmly guaranteed.

But in this new international order there will be a cruel rise in the inequality of opportunities throughout the world. With the consolidation of societies that are freer, more advanced technologically, more responsible environmentally and more pluralistic culturally, contrasts persist that are unacceptable to the conscience of mankind. Poverty, unfulfilled basic human needs, unemployment and intolerance are problems that continue to affect all countries, but they are tragic in developing countries, and especially in the least advanced of them.

In this context, the family stands out once again conspicuously as the basic unit of society - overwhelmed but also the source of meaningful change. It stands out as the natural structure for fostering the potentials of all its members, and as the irreplaceable agent for social-development policies.

Chile welcomed the United Nations call to commemorate the International Year of the Family and wishes to share with the Assembly its pride at having done so with conviction and commitment. For we achieved the first of the goals also we had set ourselves: putting the family on our civic agenda. Today we as a society are more concerned with the family, because we understand it better. Studies carried out as part of the Year showed that family-related aspirations are a high priority among the majority in our country, and that there are many kinds of families facing many kinds of problems.

A traditionally private subject has become a public concern, and today we are redefining our social policies in terms of the criteria of integration and intersectoralism, which arise when planning is no longer part of an abstract ideal, but rather part of a flexible dialogue with reality itself.

The family is paramount for Chile because of our cultural identity, our historical memory and our traditions. Hence, we all know that to preserve the family is to be responsible for its development, for its changes, for its problems and difficulties and for its vast creative possibilities as an agent of the values that mobilize us as a nation.

We know that in many countries macroeconomic structural-adjustment policies have exacerbated unemployment and all the other manifestations of poverty and violence. We also know that there has been an especially hard impact on women, owing to their position in the workforce and in the family. The reduction or elimination of social services has affected women's access to employment and have transferred the burden of providing those services to families - and within those families, to women. This results from a structural situation that places unequal value on the activities of men and of women. In that connection, I believe that the main changes in the family in recent decades relate directly to changes in the status of women in various societies; we must recognize that linkage in devising modern, democratic policies.

Chile has successfully made the transition to democracy; our rate of economic growth has been some 6 per cent over the past decade. At the same time, our modernization has been imbalanced, and poverty persists.

The Government of President Eduardo Frei has clearly defined its priority: we aspire to the eradication of extreme poverty by the end of the century. In order to do this, we need more democracy, improved economic growth and social policies that will provide equal opportunities for the most marginalized. The family emerges as the prime and fundamental unit for the proper development of society.

The family is at the heart of our development aims, because in the family no one is superfluous, neither the elderly nor the disabled, nor can the new era be built as long as the inequality of women and the marginalization of youth persist, and as long as children continue to inherit from their parents and grandparents the lack of opportunities.

Because of this conviction, we strongly value the contribution made by the various international conferences convened by the United Nations on the relevant issues. It is therefore particularly important that this Conference precedes the one that will be held next year in Beijing on the subject of women.

The Sixth Regional Conference of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, held in preparation for the Beijing Conference, which has just been held in Mar del Plata, Argentina, came to the conclusion that we cannot conceive of the inclusion of women in the public sector unless there is greater equity in the private sector. This means that we also need to promote greater participation by men in family duties.

The International Year of the Family is a step towards the Fourth World Conference on Women; changes in individual sectors help to promote overall change.

The Government of Chile is taking important strides in its social policies for the benefit of women who are heads of households and in its policies for dealing with the situation of pregnant teenagers. We are developing a plan for the establishment of child-care centres for children of working mothers, and studies are being carried out with a view to creating networks for the support of victims of family violence. We have also made progress in legal reform. A few weeks ago, the

first legal text defining and imposing sanctions on violence within the family was promulgated, and there has also been a reform in the legal status of married women.

At present there is a draft before parliament concerning filiation, designed to ensure the equal status of all children before the law.

As regards our work in public policy, we are seeking to promote equality of opportunity for all types of family units, and to make the family a place that generates equal opportunities and rights for all its members. All of this is in line with Chile's ratification of international instruments such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

In order to build a suitable national awareness, the Government has undertaken to encourage public debate and to open up opportunities for families, in various fields and spheres, thus increasing their resources and their possibilities.

In this task, the National Service for Women has called on public and private organizations and on society in general to consider proposed policies that would benefit all families, whatever their nature and their origin, with a view to promoting real equality of opportunity for all.

Our commitment to generate clear equality of opportunity, without distinction as to sex or status, has also led us to participate with enthusiasm and hope in the World Summit for Social Development to be held by the United Nations in Copenhagen next year.

The experience of developing countries has increasingly shown us the hard truth that the democratic political system, as well as economic growth, will be hampered if they are not able to incorporate the most vulnerable sectors of society. It shows us also that without democracy and without growth it is also impossible to eradicate poverty.

The three imperatives are not successive stages. We cannot attempt to be first rich, then free, and later on just. This has always been the illusion of authoritarianism and populism. We know the results.

The struggle against poverty is an imperative of justice, but it is also one of efficacy. Either development is by all and for all, or, in the long term, it is by and for no one.

The struggle against poverty, against discrimination and against injustice is also a global struggle. It is as global today as are the markets and the media. Throughout history the family, despite its infinite variations, has always been the nucleus for the survival of mankind, as well as the great transmitter of the culture. Today too the family offers a great opportunity to make progress in realizing the universal values on the basis of which the United Nations was founded: the values of democracy, of peace, of freedom and of justice. The family continues to be the first and the primary nucleus in the building of a better humanity.

I am grateful for the opportunity to reiterate the commitment of the Government and people of Chile to the celebration of the International Year of the Family. Here, we have sown the seeds of the future, and the harvest, we are sure, will bear the fruit of human dignity.

The meeting rose at 6.25 p.m.